

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HEALTH SERVICES

TO:	HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD		
DATE:	9 OCTOBER 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	9
TITLE:	READING'S AUTISM STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN		
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 A range of partners contributed to the development of Reading's Autism Strategy that sets out the plans to improve support for children, young people and adults with autism in the borough. The Strategy was approved by Reading's Health and Wellbeing Board at their meeting on 17th April 2015.
- 1.2 The Health and Wellbeing Board endorsed the establishment of the Autism Partnership Board to progress the delivery of the Strategy through an Action Plan to set out the detail of work needed. This report presents the Autism Strategy Action Plan developed by the Autism Partnership Board as Appendix A to this report.
- 1.3 The Action Plan aims to present focused areas of work that are deliverable by partners who make up the Autism Partnership Board. The Board recognises that the Action Plan will need to be updated on a regular basis as progress is made in these areas to deliver the objectives set out in the Strategy.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 To note the Action Plan produced by the Autism Partnership Board that sets out the areas for progress to deliver the Autism Strategy's key objectives.
- 2.2 To agree for the Autism Partnership Board to continue to progress work on the Action Plan and to bring yearly updates to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Department of Health published 'Think Autism' in 2014 as an update to the first national autism strategy, 'Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives'. The new document updated the strategy with the progress made since 'Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives' was published in 2010, and confirmed the government's commitment to delivering the priorities identified in the strategy that aimed to improve the lives of adults with autism.
- 3.2 The statutory guidance published alongside the 'Think Autism' strategy set out the responsibilities of local authorities and other agencies such as health organisations to support the implementation of the strategy in local areas, including their statutory duties from the Autism Act 2009 or other Acts of Parliament such as the Care Act.
- 3.3 'Think Autism' covers support for adults with autism, and the transition of children and young people into adult services. Support for children and young people with autism is addressed separately, with statutory responsibilities for local authorities that impact on this support contained in the Children and Families Act.

4. READING'S AUTISM STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

- 4.1 A Steering Group made up of representatives from across Council services, health services, voluntary sector organisations and families of people with autism led the work to develop an Autism Strategy for Reading. This Strategy was informed by a needs assessment completed by Berkshire Autistic Society in 2013 that included consultation with people with autism and their families, mapping of existing provision in Reading, and an examination of population projections and data to understand need.
- 4.2 The draft Strategy was consulted on with wider partners across the local authority, health services, the voluntary sector, and people with autism and their families. After taking this feedback into further drafts, a final version of the Strategy was presented to the Health & Wellbeing Board for sign-off in April 2015. The Strategy set out some high-level priorities for improving support for people with autism in Reading:
 1. Increasing awareness and understanding of autism
 2. Improving access to diagnosis
 3. Supporting better outcomes for people with autism
 4. Supporting people with autism to live safely and as independently as possible
 5. Supporting families and carers of people with autism
 6. Improving how we plan and manage support
- 4.3 The Health & Wellbeing Board report in April 2015 noted that the Strategy touched a wide range of services within the Council and across partners, as it spanned support for autistic children, young people, adults, and their families and carers. Rather than duplicating existing work in these areas, the Strategy

aimed to align with these services and to ensure the needs of autistic people are taken into account within ongoing wider work, for example through the delivery of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Strategy and the Berkshire West Joint Commissioning Plan for Services for People with Learning Disabilities and Challenging Behaviour.

- 4.4 Following sign-off of the Strategy, the Steering Group that led the production of the document changed into a permanent Autism Partnership Board to oversee the delivery of Strategy. The Health & Wellbeing Board endorsed this approach. The Autism Partnership Board retains a broad membership that includes people with autism and their families and carers.
- 4.5 The Autism Partnership Board has worked to develop an Action Plan for the delivery of the Autism Strategy. This focuses on actions that are achievable and that will allow for progress against the six priorities identified in the Strategy, with a lead organisation - although it is recognised that partnership working is needed to effectively deliver some of this work. The majority of the actions are to be delivered in the next year, and the Plan will be refreshed in the future to look at how these first actions can be built upon for further progress to be achieved.
- 4.6 The Autism Strategy was developed with the aim of strengthening partnership working, to make the most effective use of existing resources. This collaborative approach has continued into the development of the Action Plan, where a wide range of partners have contributed. The actions cover work across a number of services and organisations that supports the overarching priorities. Both the Strategy and the Action Plan are set in the context of reducing budgets across Council services and other partners. There is no additional resource available to deliver the Action Plan. The Action Plan is focused on how existing resources across partners can be used most effectively, and the actions identified fit with work already underway or planned for the organisations involved.
- 4.7 The Strategy and the Action Plan aim to align with existing local plans and strategies across the wide range of areas that cross-over with support for people with autism. The Partnership Board will ensure that the ongoing work on the Action Plan continues to align in this way as updated plans and strategies are developed. This includes the Raising Attainment Strategy 2015-18 which sets out the Council's ambitions to ensure that children achieve well at school, including those with Special Educational Needs (which may include children with autism).
- 4.8 The Action Plan includes information on what the impact of achieving the actions will be on the outcomes for people with autism, and how we will measure when we have achieved this. Some of the actions refer to new services and approaches where a baseline measure will need to be identified initially. Further work to agree these measures and the way that information such as service user feedback can best be collected and analysed will be carried out by the Autism Partnership Board. This will be used to report progress on delivery of the Autism Strategy. It will also inform the refresh of the Action Plan and the completion of the Autism Self-Assessment.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 The Strategy supports Priority 1 in the Council's Corporate Plan 2015-18, "Safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable". The focus on early support through universal services also supports Priority 2, "Providing the best life through education, early help and healthy living".
- 5.2 The Strategy is aligned with Reading's Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2013-16, which includes a Goal to 'reduce the impact of long term conditions with approaches focused on specific groups'.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 Consultation with people with autism, their families and carers, and a wide range of partners and providers heavily informed the needs assessment completed by Berkshire Autistic Society and the production of the Autism Strategy. Ongoing engagement with people with autism and their families will be central to delivery of the actions set out within the Action Plan.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was completed for the Autism Strategy that did not identify any negative adverse impact on any group with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Strategy and Action Plan have been developed with regard to the statutory duties for local authorities from the Autism Act 2009 and other related legislation. Key requirements from this legislation include the responsibilities for local authorities to:
 - Develop the area's commissioning plan around services for adults with autism using the best available information about adults with autism in the area
 - Appoint a joint commissioner/senior manager who has in their portfolio a clear commissioning responsibility for adults with autism
 - Ensure that the views of adults with autism and their carers are taken into account in the development of services locally

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 As noted above, the Action Plan was developed in the context of making the most effective use of existing resources. There are no new resources for delivering the Autism Strategy. There is also no ring-fenced funding available for autism.
- 9.2 The Action Plan aims to be realistic about what is achievable with existing resources for the Council and other organisations, within the context of reducing budgets. It sets out those areas where there are deliverable actions to make progress towards the longer-term objectives in the Autism Strategy and where a tangible difference could be had on outcomes for people with autism, their carers and families.

- 9.3 While there are no specific savings proposed as part of the Autism Strategy Action Plan, delivery of the actions should mean that partners are in a better position to support people with autism within constrained resources. One of the drivers of the Autism Strategy is to enable autistic people to live more independent, fulfilling lives. Achieving some of the actions in the autism strategy around increased awareness, better trained staff and effective community-based support should mean we can reduce or delay the number of autistic people who need more costly, intensive support from health and/or social care services.
- 9.4 In 2015 the Department of Health invited bids for funding from an Autism Innovation Fund. It also awarded all local authorities an Autism Capital Grant of £18,500 to support the local delivery of 'Think Autism'. There is no expectation that this funding will be repeated and no new money is expected to support the delivery of the Action Plan. However, the work to develop the Action Plan does mean that the Autism Partnership Board is prepared so that any future opportunities for additional resources that are identified can be put to the most effective use.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Reading's Autism Strategy
- 10.2 Equality Impact Assessment for Reading's Autism Strategy
- 10.3 'Think Autism: Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives, the strategy for adults with autism in England: an update' (2014)
- 10.4 'Fulfilling and Rewarding Lives: The Strategy for Adults with Autism in England' (2010)